

## *Ceiba (Chorisia) speciosa*—Floss Silk Tree

*Ceiba speciosa*, commonly called the Floss Silk tree is in the hibiscus family, Malvaceae and originated in seasonally dry areas of Brazil and Argentina. This large tree (40-60 ft tall) has a distinctive habit, flowers, fruits and seeds. The common name for this species in Spanish is “Palo Borracho” or “Drunken Stick” which is a comical comment on its unique habit. The Floss Silk Tree has a swollen trunk base with vicious prickles or thorns and rather horizontal, irregularly spaced branches. The bark is green on juvenile trees but pale gray on older ones. The prickles protect the tree from herbivores trying to reach the water storing tissues in the trunk. The leaves are alternate in arrangement and palmately

compound. The tree loses its leaves in the fall or in response to cold weather. Showy hibiscus-like flowers are produced in abundance in the fall. There are five thick petals which are deep pink at the tips and white with speckles at the throat. The fruits are hard and brown but contain seeds with silky hairs. This silky floss gives us the English common name. This species is related to the kapok tree (*C. pentandra*). The floss from this tree has had commercial use for stuffing.

Floss Silk trees can be seen on Victoria Avenue between Gibson and Van Buren, Groveland and Millsweet, at the back of the Dr. Lewis Garden at Jane Street and in the Dammers Butterfly Garden at Mary Street.

